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MAY 2020

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Notes from our Chairman

I know it has been an incredibly difficult and challenging time for all businesses with some being hugely impacted and others trying to find a way to continue safely through the current pandemic. Whilst networking may seem low down the list of priorities it is important to stay in touch with other businesses so that we can all share our experiences and help one another with support and advice, but also for the businesses that are able to keep on working to stay in contact with existing or potential customers and clients.

With that in mind we aim to host a monthly meeting via office teams where information on support can be provided followed by networking. We have not yet worked on a way of supplying a virtual buffet but I'm assured Jo is working on that. At worst we can livestream a picture of some chips. Those meetings are going to be shorter but more frequent than our normal meetings and will be getting under way shortly, so broadband connection allowing, I hope we can all virtually meet soon.



Ashley Harkus
Chairman,
Torfaen
Business
Voice

Dates for your Diary

18/06/20 - Torfaen Business Voice - 5:00pm TBC

17/09/20 - Torfaen Business Voice - 5:00pm TBC

03/12/20 - Torfaen Business Voice - 5:00pm TBC

Torfaen Business Voice Virtual Networking Meetings

We are proud of our business club networking events, they are very well attended and offer a vital tool to local businesses who want to reach out, gain from others and ultimately gain business leads.

In these unprecedented times it is as important as ever to continue to offer that opportunity for members to be part of a larger business network, give support and advice, find out what others are doing and plan the way forward for your business.

The committee have been working on how this can be achieved on a regular basis through virtual meeting and we are excited to tell you we will be offering these meetings soon.

An e-mail will be with you shortly giving you details on how to attend so watch this space!



Supporting our business network

We're conscious that at the moment our members will be bombarded with emails from a number of different sources offering advice, guidance and – occasionally – the odd scam.

We'd like to know some of the key questions and issues you're facing and not yet finding the answers to. We can't guarantee that we'll have the answers either, but we'll certainly try to find out on behalf of our members and the wider local business community.

Drop us an email to joanne.john@torfaen.gov.uk with your questions.

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Funding Support for Businesses during COVID19

In these ever changing times we all have to make sure our business remain sustainable. Here is a brief outline of the support available to date:

Business Type	Conditions	Support
Retail/Leisure/Hospitality	Rateable value less than £500,000	100% Business Rates Relief
Retail/Leisure/Hospitality	Rateable value £12,001-£50,000	Grant: £25,000 Application form to Torfaen Council
All	Rateable value <=£12,000 and if receiving SBRR	Grant: £10,000 Application form to Torfaen Council
SMEs	Under 250 employees	2 weeks Statutory Sick Pay each employee with Covid-19 Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme offering loans of up to £5 million for SMEs through the British Business Bank. Bounce Back Loan offering loans from £2,000 - £50,000 WG Grants of up to £100,000
Larger firms		Bank of England Covid-19 Corporate Financing Facility (CFF)
Firms employing people	Anyone on payroll at 19th March, even if they've been let go since	Job Retention Scheme Wage support: 80% of wages up to £2,500 per employee
All firms and self-employed		UK Self-employed Income support HMRC Time to Pay service Mortgage Holidays Suspension of VAT payments WG Development Bank of Wales Loan
Self-employed		Welsh Government scheme tbc Self-Assessment Tax Payments deferred

Welsh Government Business Rules

Have you started to plan how your business can open?

Rules to protect workers during the Coronavirus outbreak came into force last month.

Have you thought how this would affect your business and how you will need to start planning when restrictions are eased to get your business back up and running?

Here are some ideas for the things you might to consider, remembering of course that adhering to the Government's guidance will be paramount.

- How will I ensure that my staff and customers are able to maintain social distancing requirements?
- How can I reconfigure desks, production lines, or other work activities so that people aren't facing one another directly?
- What changes do I need to make to cleaning routines to ensure that the workplace stays safe for staff and customers alike?
- Can I rearrange shift patterns to avoid mixing groups of staff?
- What do I need to do with staff welfare facilities to make sure they are suitable for the return to work?

More guidance will be issued to explain what is expected of employers and businesses over the coming months as restrictions are lifted.

For specific settings please refer to [sector specific guidance](#).



Returning to work – issues for employers to consider.

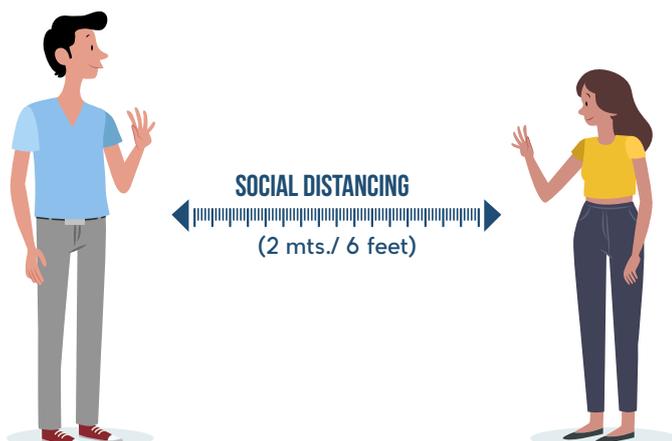
As other countries start to gradually release lockdown conditions and as our Government appears to be preparing for a slow relaxation of the rules, employers need to consider the steps that they should take to protect their workforce.

Whilst some sectors have been able to continue working through the lockdown using a combination of remote working or workplace policies to attempt to ensure a safe working environment, other sectors expect to be gradually allowed to reopen their businesses. Whilst information is scant at present, larger employer groups have suggested that at least three weeks preparation time is required.

The Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy has recently published guidance on the suggested measures that should be taken to ensure workers safety.

The first step would be to prepare a strategic plan to return to work focusing on the health and safety of the workforce, how building premises should be adapted to minimise risk, whether remote working is still possible, and if not, the steps that should be put in place to ensure social distancing. Whether policies need to be put in place to prevent contamination between employees and how client or customer contact can be maintained whilst ensuring a safe working environment.

Clearly, employers who depending on sector, have experienced of varying degree of business disruption with many having to entirely mothball their businesses will be anxious to be able to resume business activity as soon as possible, although the safety of both their employees and clients or customers has to be paramount. A failure to plan or implement appropriate policies could lead to an increase in infection rate of the virus jeopardising both the community and potentially leading to a further lockdown but also on an individual level a business has a duty of care to protect them and a breach of that duty which encouraged or permitted staff to work in unsafe conditions could lead to a variety of consequences from civil claims to criminal responsibility.



Whilst this is not an exhaustive list of the steps to be taken as each business will be different, the draft guidance suggests the following:

- Ensure you know how you are going to communicate with your staff so they know what you are going to do and how you expect them to behave.
- You should carry out a health and safety risk assessment of your premises. It is unlikely that any premises that are too small to allow social distancing would be deemed as safe.
- Consider and record any adaptations that you could make to stay within Government guidance. The plan should also deal with whether clients or customers should be allowed in the premises or whether alternative arrangements can be made. Many businesses are able to contact their clients remotely and it is likely to remain the case that face to face contact will be limited until it is safe to do so.
- Consider the minimum number of staff required within the office at any one time and consider whether it is possible to continue remote working. You will have to give special consideration to staff who have underlying health conditions or who have been advised to shield. If those staff are currently remote working, it is unlikely to be reasonable to require them to attend at an office or work premises. You may wish to think about flexible working and staggered working hours.
- Businesses should consider how their facilities which are normally shared are dealt with. Will the office canteen remain open? Will employees have to provide their own cutlery? Businesses will need to consider whether to introduce a policy which either restricts or prohibits the use of communal facilities.
- Where facilities need to be used, for example workplace toilets, it would be necessary to consider increasing cleaning rotas and providing additional hand sanitiser and cleaning products. Businesses will need to consider whether toilets that would normally be available to customers should remain open.
- Any plan should risk assess whether personal protective equipment needs to be provided and if so where it will be sourced. That equipment could be fixed screens or personal equipment for example masks.

It would be vitally important to check government websites on a regular basis to ensure compliance and to take advice from HR departments or external advisers if in doubt.

Diversifying Your Business

Crises, at any level, are disruptive. During times of intense disruption, like the COVID-19 pandemic we are experiencing, two things are important:

1. Navigating the immediate risks posed by the crisis intelligently, to emerge with minimal damage
2. Preparing for a post-crisis world that might look distinctly different from the world we live in today.

Every crisis is also an opportunity to earn the trust and credibility of our customers, partners, community, and family by helping them deal with the crisis. Events are unfolding with astounding speed, and the picture changes on a daily if not hourly basis. We have been bombarded with noise and hype from news organisations that often focus on what's new rather than the big picture, and they sometimes don't distinguish between hard facts, soft facts, and speculation.

To help you manage employee relations well and limit the risk of disputes escalating into legal action, we have highlighted some useful points and best practice measures.

When Adversity Strikes

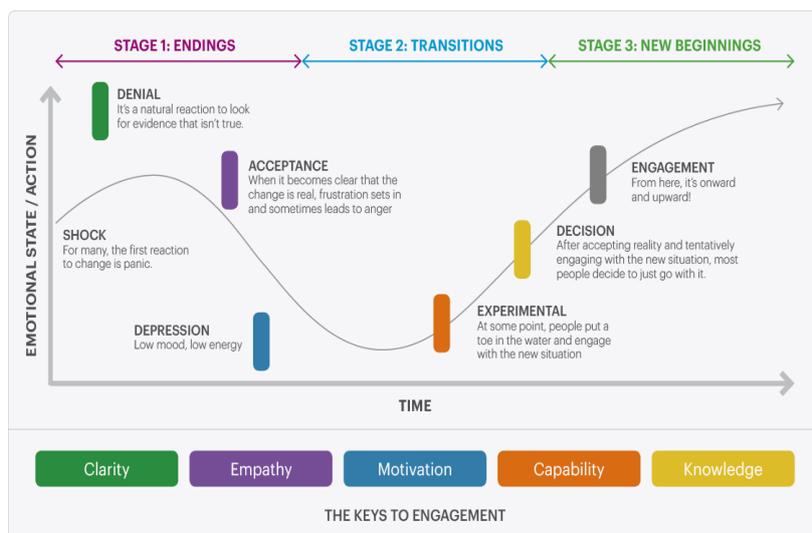
The first step is not to lose sight when adversity strikes. Most of us go with our gut when something bad happens, our habits and beliefs can keep us from acting constructively. Beware the two emotional traps.....

Deflation

A traumatic event can destabilise us and trigger off intense bursts of negative emotion. We may feel disappointed in ourselves or others, mistreated and dispirited, even besieged.

Victimisation

Assuming the role of helpless bystander in the face of an adverse event. Dismissing both criticism and helpful suggestions from others, affirm that we're right, everyone else is wrong, and no one understands us.



www.businessdoctors.co.uk/dontpanic



The capacity for resilience

When we experience a difficult episode, most of us make quick assumptions about its causes, magnitude, consequences, and duration. We instantly decide, for example, whether it was inevitable, a function of forces beyond our control, or whether we could somehow have prevented it.

This can lead us to channel our energies on the things we cannot control or have limited influence over, which only seeks to make us feel even more deflated and victimised. Instead we need to shift to “actively” thinking about how best to respond, ask ourselves what aspects we can control, what impact we can have, and how the breadth and duration of the crisis might be contained.

Focusing on Control, Impact, Breadth & Duration and asking key questions around how we can intervene, what it might look like and how we can reach out and engage our team to support us, builds resilience and helps to get a plan together.

This can lead us to overlook the weaker signals and overreact to the headlines, often exacerbated by the fact that our employees are doing the same. Rather than to step back, appraise things and take an objective view.

“A time of crisis is not just a time of anxiety and worry. It gives a chance, an opportunity, to choose well or to choose badly.”
Desmond Tutu

I would say it's becoming more and more urgent to have a plan, to put you back in control of your business. We are dealing with uncertainty. In many cases, sales have dried up. In many others we are trading with substantially less income than previously. We need to not only survive the next 180 days, but we need to come out stronger. The challenge may not be simply surviving this crisis, the challenge will be recovering before your competition beats you to your customers.



Diversify

Some businesses will find diversification easier than others, you have likely noticed the on-line and social media activity increase, businesses seeking continuity. On-line training, video link meetings with a variety of formats to choose from.

Restaurants that closed, re-opening with a take-away or delivery service, manufacturers of 3d printers making much-needed PPE and face shields, brewers and gin distilleries finding new use for ethanol supplies by making and distributing hand sanitiser and so on.... Try to maintain a big picture understanding of the situation, create an immediate plan to deal with it, and act quickly. Maintaining a constant re-framing of your understanding of what is happening. Resilience and agility is key. Resist the temptation to not disseminate plans to people until you are completely sure or be reluctant to change the plans for fear of looking indecisive or misinformed. A living document with a time stamped 'best current view' is essential to learn and adapt in a rapidly changing situation.

Matt Preece, Business Doctors.
Email: matt.preece@businessdoctors.co.uk



COVID-19 and your business

Free online courses for businesses

Digital Champion Superfast Business Wales has launched a series of free webinars for businesses affected by COVID-19.

These will help you put digital at the heart of your business to make sure your customers find you in this increasingly competitive online space.

Whether you're looking to move online and create a new 'business as usual' or maintain your brand presence locally for when things get back to normal, we have courses that suit all business needs and abilities.

In addition businesses may book onto any number of free 20-minute practical Taster sessions on the following topics:

Superfast Business Wales has also developed a range of practical How-To guides to help your business transition during COVID-19 – search online Superfast Business Wales.

To find out more and join your free webinar or to access the taster sessions search online Superfast Business Wales Events.

The webinars will help businesses focus on the three stages to consider during COVID-19:

- Working from home: productivity and well-being
- Promoting your business: engage with your local community
- Competing online: the new 'business as usual'

- Moving your business online
- Online payment systems
- Create a virtual local space
- Keep staff connected
- Manage your business from home
- Help your customers find you online

FREE ONLINE COURSES NOW AVAILABLE		
WORKING FROM HOME	PROMOTING YOUR BUSINESS	COMPETING ONLINE
The Online Office An in-depth look at how Office 365 could be a lifeline for you to quickly move your office-based work online.	Digital Fitness Advice on how to maintain your business using tools to save money and make the most of flexible working.	Cyber Security How to protect yourself from the growing number of cyber criminals operating under the cover of a global pandemic.
Social Media Basics This course shows you easy ways to raise your profile using social media and engage with your local community.	Social Media (Advanced) This course outlines how to use social media to diversify online and create a new 'business as usual'.	Introduction to SEO This course explains how to make sure customers find you online now everyone is competing for space.
Digital Marketing Basics This course covers affordable email marketing, SEO and social media strategies to drive website traffic and sales.	Digital Marketing (Advanced) Advanced techniques to help you to compete in this new busy world of online sales.	Websites This course covers a range of techniques to build a professional website that attracts new customers.

SEARCH ONLINE SUPERFAST BUSINESS WALES EVENTS



What businesses can be doing RIGHT NOW to market themselves online

As we continue lockdown, many business owners have now accepted a new 'normal' in how they operate. This means that businesses continue to trade with each other and money is being spent.

So, what can owners of small, independent businesses be doing RIGHT NOW to market themselves online? In this article, we'll take a look at some different industries that many of our clients work in, and what they can be doing to generate more business.

Restaurants & Pubs

Although businesses in hospitality have been hit hardest, there is still opportunity to trade to local customers both physically and online. We've seen a number of restaurants adapt to offer takeout and delivery service. Some restaurants are also creating meal packs that contain meat and veg to be cooked at home, either following an included recipe card, or to make a meal of the customer's choice.

Online, gift vouchers are being sold via restaurant websites or gifting websites such as buyavoucher.co.uk



Hair & Beauty

Similar to hospitality, businesses such as hair salons, barbershops and beauty spas have closed their doors, meaning that all business has to be moved online, such as the selling of e-gift vouchers to be used on services once lockdown is relaxed.

People are also looking online for beauty tips to maintain their appearance whilst staying at home. Social media marketing in the form of video tips for nail care, hair treatments or the best way to cut children's hair are great ways of providing useful advice to customers whilst retaining brand awareness.

Gardening & Landscaping

With the weather starting to (hopefully) improve, more people will be escaping the indoors for some time outside in the garden. Late Spring is peak time to be planting and undertaking general garden maintenance so businesses such as landscape gardeners, garden centres and nurseries are in a great position to be able to provide useful content via social media and blogging on topics such as 'What flowers to plant during May' or 'How to build a small garden planter'.



DIY & General Trades

Work will have dried up for many trades people such as plasterers, plumbers and painters & Decorators because of strict social distancing measures meaning many households are no-go areas.

However, with many people gaining a lot of spare time whilst on lockdown, small DIY jobs around the house including painting & decorating are taking priority. This is a great opportunity for trades people to create visual content for social media that would act as how-to's or top tips. 'Best colour choices for a kitchen' or 'how to fix a dripping tap' would benefit lots of amateur DIY'ers that want to spend their time doing those jobs that never get done, or to simply modernise their home.

Photographers & Videographers

The cancellation of weddings, public events and mass gatherings will have been a big disruption to photographers and videographers that rely on these events to make a living.

So, how can these types of business continue to market their brand? The expertise and knowledge they have may come in useful to amateur photographers who want to improve their technique or know how to take better photographs. Social media posts or online blogs such as 'How to take better portraits on an Iphone' or 'How to make lighting on a budget' would make useful reading to many people who would like to practice whilst in lockdown.

Personal Trainers & Nutritionists

Although gyms and health centres are shut, people want to continue to stay fit and active whilst at home. Celebrity PT Joe Wicks was an early adopter of online technology by providing his daily fitness classes for kids through his youtube account.

These types of businesses have a wealth of information and knowledge that can be put into downloadable training plans by creating video and text content that can be shared online. Online memberships can also be created whereby a customer can watch content on-demand, helping the business owner retain a passive income.

Obviously, there are many more industries that can learn to adapt right now in order to continue trading. If you'd like to discuss ideas with us or develop a new marketing plan for your business, we'd love to speak to you. Call us on 07786 444472 or email hello@allianceagency.co.uk

Calling all local food producers in Torfaen

If you are a local business, or know of any currently offering an essential grocery delivery service which isn't listed on our [dedicated web page](#) - please e-mail create@torfaen.gov.uk and we'll get you added.

Let's support our local businesses!

Food Innovation Wales

Has your company introduced signage to explain social distancing rules and the maximum capacity in each area of your factory? Our COVID-19 tool kit has a number of considerations for food and drink manufacturers:

<http://foodinnovation.wales/wp-content/uploads/FIW-CVGMP-01052020.pdf>

Need some advice as a food producer in Torfaen, we are here to help! e-mail Tracey.marsh@torfaen.gov.uk



Looking after your mental health is as important as looking after your business!

How am I?

During the last few months I bet many of you have spent time asking the question of others, 'how are you?' however how often have you asked the question 'how am I?' Well today you have permission to do just that.

It is so important at this current time more than ever that you don't lose sight of your mental health and its importance to your overall well-being. This is not the time to allow pride to get in the way, this is a time to be honest with yourself and to reach out to others for help if you need it.

The whole world has been thrown into turmoil, chaos and uncertainty so know that however it is for you someone will be feeling the same. The other day I read this quote on Facebook – 'We are not all in the same boat, but we are in the same storm' (Author unknown). I love it and think it is so true, it is a bit like the John Donne book – No man is an Island. Rest assured wherever your feelings, emotions and thoughts are right now you are not alone.

Take time out today to be still, to listen to the birds (if it is sunny), the rain on the window if it's not.

Allow your thoughts, feelings and emotions to surface, don't be afraid of what they bring up, and write them down. It is totally natural to feel scared, right now, it is ok to be tearful and yes, it is OK to feel angry; whatever is coming up tell yourself you are fine with it.

Once you have done this exercise reach out and talk to someone, a partner, a friend, a business colleague or team associate, be honest and start the conversation with 'can I tell you how I am feeling?' If you don't feel able to do this with someone close then connect with strangers on an on-line group or call a charity line or a mentor / coach, whoever it is will understand.

When I carry out my talks around mental health and anxiety I always finish with 'Communication is the best Medication' right now it is more important than ever – please reach out, your well-being will thank you for it.

This may feel like the end for some but if you can pick yourself up, diversify, collaborate and / or be inventive this could be the start of a new yet positive journey ahead. Remember out of foundations filled with rubble skyscrapers are built.

Stay safe and stay well - Beverley Jones
Awaken Coaching www.awakencoaching.co.uk